

# Reviews

*Conducted by Theodore Hornberger*

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## Scholarly Strategy: The Poe Case

A SUBTLE FLUID IS AN INVISIBLE WHATSIT WHICH A SCIENTIST INVENTS TO salvage a theory which has some bugs in it but which is still too useful to discard. In explaining a literary allusion to a subtle fluid, I had occasion to ask a class to think of a modern instance of one. The students quickly came up with several, among them the various subatomic particles which physicists, past and present, have proposed to account for irregularities in data. Neither I nor my students are physicists, but we had all heard of the direction in which research was going in a field not our own. Would a scientist or other layman know, say, that in our field Stephen Crane today seems a little less a rebel, a little more a child of his times, than he did ten years ago? The fact that he would not hints that scientists do a better job of communicating with laymen than we do. One might of course argue that the public is more interested in the neutrino than in the life and hard times of Stephen Crane; perhaps, but a quick check with one's colleagues is liable to indicate that they too know more about the direction of research in subatomic physics (or whatever it's called) than they do about Crane studies. Literary scholars do not, it would seem, do a good job of communicating with specialists, let alone with laymen.

Now, it would probably be a Good Thing if scholarly investigation in the social sciences and the humanities were generally cumulative, the way it is in many fields of science. I did not mean here to propose any too simplistic definition of knowledge, final truth or the approaches to either, and friends in the sciences to whom I have made remarks of this sort have always been quick to point out that science is not the best of all possible scholarly worlds. I think, nevertheless, that scientists have generally a more healthy approach to the issues of publication and the transmission of knowledge. It is a commonplace among historians that there is at least a thirty-year gap between good new work and the textbook; while re-Revisionist grapples with re-re-Revisionist in the history journals, textbook presses turn out books innocent of developments since Turner. But even historians (and I mean the word "even" playfully) seem to have less difficulty in this matter than do students of the arts. In any field the problem is especially critical for interdisciplinarians, who very much need access to good general statements of the direction in which work is going in areas outside their own fields of special competence.

James Conant speaks of scientific "tactics and strategy." There is a scholarly "tactics and strategy" as well, though too many authors of journal articles write without thought of the body of knowledge to which they are presumably making a contribution. Their footnotes give them away—they are more an indication that the author has served a sort of penance than a record of an intellectual pilgrimage. The results are bad for scholarly morale. It might be worth our while, even at the risk of oversimplifying, to make clear, in the classroom and in our own published work, what we feel is the relationship between research, scholarship and the state of our knowledge of any given problem. A kind of literary scholarship with an unenviable reputation for aridity, for example, is the source study. What good is a source study? There is an easy answer at hand: an article entitled "Another Source for Poe's 'Metzengerstein'" is a contribution to human knowledge, and as such an end in itself. But an answer of this sort will not satisfy a pragmatically minded student. Our analogy with the sciences may be of some use here. The source study might be considered as bringing in another item of data, the result, so to speak, of another bit of "pure" research, good in itself, of course, but also "on the record," and, presumably, available to some later investigator who has in mind a larger issue and who is looking around for data already gathered which may shed some light on his problem. The relationship between the two types of study is rather like that between pure and applied science, except that "applied" in the humanities will have to mean "of use to other scholars." Ideally, we interdisciplinarians should add, the results of "pure" scholarship should be accessible to "applied" scholars working outside of the field as well. Perhaps what we have here is more closely analogous to the relationship between empirical research and so-called "theories of the middle range" in the field of sociology. Sociologists often lament the wide gap between the work of the "nose-counters" and that of the brave generalizers; they would like to see the development of an area in between, in which scholars making solid use of the statistical information gathered by the empiricists could produce studies general enough to answer real social questions, yet sufficiently inductive in process, sufficiently grounded in hard facts, to carry authority.

The fact that humanistic scholars do not always build on one another's work strikes me as a more important failing than the more publicized fact that they sometimes ride critical hobby-horses, but the two are really rather closely related. A rocking horse winner around 1930, for example, was the Freudian approach. In the Poe literature the two major books which appeared around this time were, as one might expect,

Freudian studies of the man's work; both are, in their ways, very good books, though less carefully qualified than most recent psychological criticism. What strikes the modern reader about Joseph Wood Krutch's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study in Genius* (New York, 1926) and Marie Bonaparte's *Edgar Poe: Etude Psychoanalytique*<sup>1</sup> is that they make the assumption that every word which came from Poe's pen carries the same weight as words coming from the mouth of a patient on the psychiatrist's couch. A great many of the things which Krutch and Bonaparte said then about Poe are probably true, but in the thirty years since these books appeared we have come to know a great deal about the career of Poe and about the process by which he produced his works.

Now if Poe studies were in fact cumulative in some sort of healthy way, one would expect that all work done between 1930 and 1960 would somehow be put to use in later volumes covering roughly the same ground. Of course, in selecting Poe as an example of a failure in our literary scholarship, I am to some extent loading the dice;<sup>2</sup> one could select figures for whom the record is not quite so black. Friends who are Shakespearian scholars tell me, for example, that the situation there is quite satisfactory; among American men of letters Hawthorne and Faulkner seem to me for the most part to have come closer to us as the volume of scholarship and criticism has increased, and I think this is largely because the scholars working in these areas have operated with honest respect for the work of their predecessors. There has been some good James scholarship from the start; the Melville literature varies in quality but certainly our knowledge of Melville is far more accurate today than it was in the early 1920s. So I will admit at the start that Poe's case is a bad one.

It is bad not because the Poe scholarship has been bad, but because it has not been cumulative. For example, a great turning point came—or should have come—in 1941, when the late Arthur Hobson Quinn published his important *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (New York, 1941), a work which clarified our biographical information. Professor Quinn established that the most spectacularly unsavory things we thought we knew about Poe were, if not untrue, at least highly doubtful. He explained in detail the manner in which the Reverend Rufus Griswold, Poe's literary executor, had warped evidence, changed passages, omitted

<sup>1</sup> (Paris, 1933) and *The Life and Work of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, tr. John Rodker (London, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> In another sense I am not loading them at all, for the Poe scholarship has involved foolishness from the outset. A good account of one phase of it is John Carl Miller's "Introduction" (xv-xlix) to the catalogue of the John Henry Ingram Poe Collection at the University of Virginia (Charlottesville, 1960).

words, distorted pertinent data and, in general, conducted a systematic smear campaign. More evidence of the same sort—evidence, that is, that the standard creepy portrait of Poe is based on less-than-reliable data—has come in since 1941. But essentially it is Quinn's great contribution to have told us that while we do not know that Poe was not addicted to alcohol, drugs or perversions, we certainly do not know that he was. No one has to my knowledge refuted any of Professor Quinn's basic assertions; one would have thought that his book would have been the end of all unqualified statements about Poe's worst behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Professor Quinn's book has its faults. It should not really have been called a critical biography; the criticism is distinguished chiefly by enthusiasm and today too much of it seems devoted to tilting against wind-mills. The nearly meaningless old chestnut, "Was Poe really American?" receives terribly dead-serious attention; the answer seems generally to be, Yes, because Poe uses here and there recognizable American settings.<sup>4</sup> But limitations of this sort do not obviate the fact that Professor Quinn had given us a new way of looking at Poe, one so thoroughly grounded in firmly established information that one would have every right to assume that every scholar devoting himself to Poe after 1941 would begin with Quinn's facts and Quinn's explanations of what was not fact but conjecture.

From a totally different method of investigation there also came a large body of new information, this as nearly analogous to "pure" data as anything the literary scholar is ever liable to handle: the monumental labors of investigators working independently had turned up so many clearly identifiable sources for Poe's subject matter in his short stories that the casual scholar might have thought that Poe's creativity was simply a matter of scissors and glue pot. But curiously, for the most part, not even this kind of simple reaction appeared. No one drew the line, so to speak, under the column of data which was coming in and added it up. When even specialists fail to assess the significance of new work, pity the inter-disciplinarian who needs information from several areas at once. As I

<sup>3</sup> Bad behavior of a different sort, of course, we have plenty of evidence for. There is, for example, the matter of his plagiarism in a few cases, notably in *The Journal of Julius Rodman*. There are also a few well documented incidents, such as the famous Boston lecture, in which Poe made a terrible fool of himself. If one wishes to damn Poe there is ground enough on which to damn him without the help of the abnormal psychologist.

<sup>4</sup> It is symptomatic of the frame of mind which produced this sort of judgment that in F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), Matthiessen refuses to discuss Poe, dismissing him in a half page on the grounds that he is not American enough to include in the book. Parrington had also dismissed him, saying that he was an appropriate subject for an abnormal psychologist or a belletrist, but not for an historian of American thought.



have suggested above, the trouble probably lies in the fact that we are not accustomed to thinking of information of this sort as cumulative. Taken cumulatively, what do these source studies say? They say that however we are to rank Poe as a creative artist, his contribution must be evaluated in terms of manner and not matter. This sounds so much like a critical truism that it deserves to be explained. From decades of source studies, we have learned that Poe, who turned to the short story because he could not make a living as a poet, had apparently a fairly commercial attitude toward the subject of his stories. He was highly familiar with the content of popular magazines of the day, kept files and check lists of plot types and subjects liable to sell, operated from a theory of creativity (perhaps rationalized after the fact) which laid heavy stress on "novelty," and does not seem to have done anything in the matter of his stories which had not been done before in popular or even hack work with which he was demonstrably familiar. What he did, in short, was to make an art form out of a second-rate sensational and subliterary genre.

Such a conclusion seems important enough to justify the patient labors of the authors of the numerous source studies, but there is an even more important conclusion to be drawn from their work. It tells us to qualify anything which we say about Poe's personality which is based solely on the content of his fiction. I do not mean to imply that Poe chose his subjects simply because they had appeared in popular magazines of the time and had sold. Obviously, he could have chosen other subjects. His choice of material which looks "sick" to us today must be in some ways psychologically meaningful. But we simply cannot assume that all of this can be read directly as a sort of psychical autobiography. If Professor Quinn's book tells us that we no longer knew for sure that Poe was depraved, the source studies, taken as a whole, show us just as conclusively that we no longer know the relationship of Poe's subject matter to his own psyche.

With the source studies to tell us that the subject matter of Poe's work is not a reliable index of his own mentality, and with Professor Quinn's work to tell us that the wild stories which we have heard about Poe are not reliable either, has Poe scholarship moved on? The sad fact is that for the most part it has not, and until 1963 the only thoroughly reliable major works on Poe were those which a nonspecialist would be least likely to consult, those which dealt with specialized topics. In 1958, for example, Patrick Quinn published *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale, Ill., 1958), which attempted to account for the puzzlingly enthusiastic reaction of the French. The book is perhaps as valuable for its lucid and sane evaluation of Poe's works as for its discussion of what the French see in him, although what Patrick Quinn has to say on this score is valuable:

he concludes generally that the French like Poe because he is very good at what he does, and because a number of their writers held a similar world-view. The French symbolists recognized in Poe a kindred spirit because Poe, especially late in his life, seems to have been arriving at conclusions about the world and about creativity which are generally described with the unfortunate pejorative "occult."<sup>5</sup>

I believe that Professor Edward H. Davidson in his *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1958) was attempting to demonstrate something comparable. Certainly he succeeded in indicating more philosophical unity in Poe's work and thinking than had previously been acknowledged. His book, however, was so mercilessly panned by reviewers for everything from faulty grammar to illogic that it has not had the impact among students of Poe which it merits.

Then there is the case of David M. Rein's book, *Edgar A. Poe: The Inner Pattern* (New York, 1960). This is a bright psychological reading of Poe. A great many of Professor Rein's conclusions about the relation of Poe's work to his biography are, in all probability, correct. It is a little dismaying, though, to find in a book written thirty years after the studies by Krutch and Bonaparte passages such as the following:

After the death of Morella, Poe, in the story gives himself a creature that he can love, a daughter. She is really Morella all over again—but with the maturity taken away. Was not Poe here confessing that he could love Virginia—but as a child, not as a woman; as a daughter, but not as a wife? (pp. 72-73)

That a scholar in 1960 could have reached such nakedly unqualified conclusions in spite of the implications of all the work done on Poe in the three decades following 1930 suggests how serious is the problem of communication. And if a specialist can be misled, how much more so an interdisciplinarian, even a very gifted one. The late Perry Miller told me playfully that he was sorry to see the drift of the Poe scholarship because now he would have to rewrite his splendidly dramatic lecture on Poe. He said that as recently as the mid-1950s he had been relying essentially on the older conception of Poe. In Rein's case, perhaps the difficulty is that he seems to rely upon the critical portions of two older biographical studies, Hervey Allen's *Israfel* (New York, 1934) and Arthur Hobson Quinn's. As indicated above, however valuable the Quinn is as a biog-

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of this matter, see the author's "In the Mystical Moist Night Air," *American Quarterly*, XIV (Summer 1962), 198-206; and Allan Tate's "The Angelic Imagination," in *The Man of Letters in the Modern World: Selected Essays, 1928-1951* (New York, 1955), pp. 113-31.

raphy, it is critically outmoded; Allen's book, because of important revelations contained in Quinn's, is simply outmoded.

Examples of this sort could be multiplied; they are unfortunate because the scholars involved clearly mean well and have something to contribute. That their studies do not build upon previous good work is sad but not scandalous. Indeed, it is not even entirely their fault. When nobody in the past has been "cumulative," when there is no place one can go to find out what has been the direction of work on a problem, it is probably a little unfair to expect each newcomer to the field to read everything in print before he takes his small step forward. One does not have to read a book on atomic physics published in the 1920s unless one is an historian of science; a book published in the 1960s will incorporate what was valid in the older study. What is scandalous is the deliberate perpetration of older slander, and this seems evident in a D. C. Heath casebook on Poe<sup>6</sup> which presents students with some of Poe's poems, fiction and letters, and then assorted older documents—by James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel P. Willis, Charles Baudelaire, John J. Moran, Whitman, Rufus Griswold and Aldous Huxley. I do not object to the oversimplified critical argument ("He's a fraud" vs. "He's a genius"), but the presentation of the Griswold memoir without a clear statement by the editors of what modern scholarship knows about Griswold's slander is, to say the least, unfortunate. It is clear from the footnotes that the editors know Quinn's work, but unless the instructor teaching this text were a Poe specialist or had been warned to watch out for the Griswold hoax, he and his class would come away from *The Enigma* with the impression that some very dead issues were very much alive. Indeed, the more sophisticated the student or instructor, the more likely the error: the editors do include a section of John J. Moran's *A Defense of Edgar Allan Poe* which says that Griswold was a liar and an "avowed and personal enemy" of Poe, but Dr. Moran's plea is so sentimentalized and overwritten that any sensitive reader lacking the facts to which Quinn had access would automatically distrust it. It is one thing to encourage students to "make up their own minds," and quite another to pretend that a matter solidly settled by distinguished scholarship is still debatable. From its eerie cover on, this paperback reflects serious discredit upon its publisher, editors and the profession of scholarship.

Much more typical of the waste of critical talent is the contribution of a bright outsider, Harry Levin, whose *The Power of Blackness* (New York, 1958) opens with a graceful apology for the author's relative un-

<sup>6</sup> *The Enigma of Poe*, eds. Warren V. Ober, Paul S. Burtness and William R. Seal Jr. (Boston, 1960).

familiarity with the world of nineteenth-century American letters. His work is an excellent introduction to the issues and problems in the works of our "black" writers, but I am afraid that his conclusions for the most part operate on the level of the intelligent undergraduate. I'm not sure that Professor Levin is aware of the extent to which his insights are truisms in American history and American literature courses. He is an extremely sensitive reader, and it is a tribute to the clarity of his mind that his section on Poe gets as far as it does. Had he only recognized that some of his conjectures were, if the evidence of the Poe scholarship means anything, practically established facts, his study could have carried the weight of considerable authority and have been far more definitive than it is.

A brief summary of all that is good and all that is bad in the Poe literature is provided by number four of Twayne's United States Author Series, in which Vincent Buranelli conscientiously attempts to brief the reader on what we know about Poe. Going, as nearly as I can make out, to the most reputable scholarly works available, Mr. Buranelli produces some eminently sane judgments: "If Poe's normal trademarks are being stressed too much today, it is an error on the right side. . ." (p. 19). "If he did not read comprehensively or exhaustively in the giants of literary criticism, he read enough in them or about them to learn about the concepts he needed" (p. 111). Statements of this sort are refreshing and well borne out by recent scholarship. But when the time comes to evaluate Poe's worth, Mr. Buranelli apparently goes not to the best of what Poe criticism we have, but rather to the same sources from which he gleaned his biographical information; the reader has perhaps by now concluded that those writers with the best feeling for Poe's biography have been for the most part the least useful as critics.<sup>7</sup> I find it a little astonishing that in a work published in 1961 and purporting to be a general introduction to the best available information on Poe, statements such as the following appear: "[Poe has] a strong claim to the titles of our best poet, our best short story writer, and our best critic" (p. 129); "[Poe] is America's greatest writer and the American writer of greatest significance in world literature" (p. 133).

Here is evidence that the foolish boundary between traditional scholarship and the New Criticism is still standing. In effect, critics do not brief

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps in fairness it would be better to say that they are not critics at all. A distinguished scholar such as Professor Quinn would really best have been called an admirer of Poe's writings, and perhaps Professor T. O. Mabbott, who is at work on a definitive edition of Poe's complete works, could best be described as a learned antiquarian. From correspondence with Mr. Mabbott and with those who have been in touch with him, I gather that, taken cumulatively, the new material he has on hand seems to support the more moderate view of Poe's biography.

themselves in the traditional scholarship; academics act as though they were frightened by sophisticated critical techniques. The curtain is as asinine as it is arbitrary. A good critic is obviously going to turn up material which is immediately useful and relevant to the literary historian. Similarly, the close reader who goes at the works of an author without familiarizing himself with the best scholarship is simply making extra work for himself.

It is pleasant to be able to report that there are of late signs of progress, although the Poe literature when compared to that surrounding almost any other major American author seems strangely backward. Contrast it, for example, with that dealing with Mark Twain: what a long way we seem to have come since 1920, the date of Van Wyck Brooks' *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*! And note that in Twain studies, the good work has come from all directions—we simply know so very much more about Twain's life that "ordealism," understood in any simple way, is an impossible position to hold. Similarly, we know so much more about the subtlety and craft of his art that simplistic "readings" must be qualified. The reaction against ordealism tended to overstress those elements in Twain's thinking which indicated his joyous wallowing in the materialism of his environment as much as the ordealists had overemphasized signs of disillusionment. But with time, it has become clear enough that the contradictions in Twain's attitudes on this and other issues simply cannot be resolved. Twain seems to have been capable of holding, with perfect sincerity, two obviously contradictory opinions on the same issue. We seem to be less troubled by contradictions, partially perhaps for the same reason that the word "paradox" is so fashionable in our criticism today, but partially also, I like to think, because we are nationally less self-conscious about the implications of an author's beliefs.

Well, the workaday side of Poe, too, is clearly in view. Perry Miller's *The Raven and the Whale* (New York, 1956) was a study of the rather snide and neurotic literary circles in New York from Poe's time through Melville's; more recently we have been given a more specialized work, one which deals explicitly with Poe's experience in the market place. This is Sidney P. Moss' *Poe's Literary Battles: The Critic in the Context of His Literary Milieu* (Durham, N.C., 1968). Mr. Moss assembles a great deal of information we have had for a long time and very lucidly points the connections between one thing and the next. He is especially good in accounting for the literary "puffing" to which Poe so vehemently objected, and to which he was himself on occasion forced to resort. A reading of Moss' book will still not convince the reader that Poe was not a jackass, but it will tend to make his behavior more readily comprehensible in

documentable terms—once again, we cannot document very much of Poe's supposedly morbid behavior, but as Moss demonstrates, we can document very well economic pressures and petty jealousies.

There is even better news. With the publication of Edward Wagenknecht's *Edgar Allen Poe: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York, 1963), we have for the first time a thoroughly reliable biographical study of Poe.<sup>8</sup> Sanity, calmness and compassion are good qualities in a biographer, and Mr. Wagenknecht has them in abundance. There are readers, I am sure, who might object to the informality of certain passages, but they will be impressed by the thoroughness with which Mr. Wagenknecht has done his homework. Aware of all the issues, real and imaginary, with which students of Poe have busied themselves, he proceeds one by one to pass sensible judgments upon them. He lays to rest—I hope—the hoary question, "was Poe American?" as follows:

I should say that Poe believed in . . . the America of Washington and Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, of Emerson, Whitman, and Mark Twain. It is true that he disbelieved in the inspiration and moral wisdom of the majority, saw Congress as a rabble in the Hudibrastic sense, denounced American materialism and dollar-chasing, suspected that democracy agreed better with talent than with genius, and took up a savage attitude toward political corruption under democracy. So did they. (p. 88)

If this is not a very strong judgment, at least it is one that can be documented, which is more than can be said of the opposite view. On the meaning of the presence of horror in Poe:

There is less out-and-out physical horror in Poe's tales than many readers suppose; he himself professed to find it offensive or disgusting except when "the severity and majesty of truth" was present to "sanctify and sustain" it. . . . (p. 55)

All his horrors can be paralleled and surpassed in contemporary writing; if he was mad, his whole generation was mad with him. (p. 57)

This not to say that Wagenknecht falls into the error of reacting so strongly against the more sensational readings of Poe's biography that he tries to hide Poe's undeniable peculiarity:

<sup>8</sup> I do not mean to imply either that Arthur Hobson Quinn's book is biographically unreliable or that anything very startling has happened since 1941 to make his book obsolete. The book's critical portions and the disproportionate amount of space given to discussion of issues which are dead ends, however, tended to obscure for any reader but a specialist its very real importance.



. . . No study of Edgar Allan Poe, written in the year 1963, or, so far as can now be foreseen, in any future year, can possibly be complete or definitive. There is simply too much in his life that we do not know and too much that we do not understand. There is even—let us admit it frankly—too much that we cannot believe. (pp. 12-13)

As refreshing as his willingness to leave unanswerable questions about Poe's biography unanswered is his attitude toward some of the more puzzling pieces in the Poe canon. Some years ago, a group of critics tried to demonstrate that Poe was a great humorist; Professor Wagenknecht knows that what they really showed was that Poe had access to an established tradition of humor and tried, on the whole unsuccessfully (at least for the modern reader), to be funny. He also quotes, without trying to explain away, Poe's honest admission in a letter to Kennedy that he himself was not sure what he was up to in some of his tales.

Unlike many writers who have tried to understand Poe in more rational terms than those which prevailed during the currency of the Griswold hoax, Wagenknecht does not attempt to minimize Poe's undeniable fascination with mysticism. " 'That God may be all in all, each must become God' " (p. 216), he quotes Poe as writing, and then adds, very accurately, ". . . and though they both foolishly failed to recognize it, Poe and the Emerson of 'Self-Reliance' were, on this point, basically in accord" (p. 217). Harry M. Campbell has remarked<sup>9</sup> that for Poe aesthetics is a kind of religion. So it is for any mystic author, and it must be said in favor of his disarmingly informal biographical study that Mr. Wagenknecht faces up honestly to those passages in Poe which have been most troubling to critics so committed to a rationalistic view of literature that they find it difficult to concede that there may have been Western authors who subscribed to other beliefs. Poe says, after all, that each individual intelligence must absorb all other intelligences, thus becoming one with the universe: this is occultism pure and simple. Pointing this out about Poe, of course, in no way domesticates him. It does, however, serve to put him clearly in context. He shared his world view and his view of the role of the artist with Shelley, with Emerson, with Blake and, for that matter, with Whitman.

Mr. Wagenknecht's method, then, generally is in the case of each problem to review the "hard" evidence which is available to us, to define carefully the areas which we do and do not know, and then to provide firm judgment when it is possible, or clearly labeled and always sensible hypothesis when it is not.

<sup>9</sup> In a letter to the author.

The appearance of sound and thoughtful judgments in a book intended for a general audience is encouraging. We must hope that the non-specialist who wants to know about Poe's life will go to this and not some other book. (A bad popular biography came out at about the same time. Others will doubtless follow.) What is discouraging is that we have known all of Mr. Wagenknecht's facts for a good long time; we have simply failed to add them up. The evidence is also there to be used for anyone who can produce an over-all critical reading of Poe's works. I would say that at the present writing we have a good idea of Poe's place, but we have as of yet failed to establish conclusively his worth.

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## Early American Science<sup>1</sup>

IN his *Early American Science Needs and Opportunities for Study*, published in 1955, Whitfield J. Bell Jr. observes that "Perhaps biography is the first kind of study needed. . . . [T]he first thing students of early science in America must do is to learn who the men of science were and what they did" (pp. 11-12). During the past decade a number of historians, in full agreement with this statement, have attempted to present many men and their achievements in forms which are at times precisely and at times only roughly biographical. Some like I. Bernard Cohen have examined the achievements (like Franklin's in electricity) in forms only incidental to biography. Others, as did Joseph I. Waring in *A History of Medicine in South Carolina* (1964), have combined history, life sketches and scientific description. Samuel X. Radbill by editing *The Autobiographical Ana of Robley Dunglison, M.D.* (1963) presented a significant life and its achievements in the subject's own words. And Edmund and Dorothy Berkeley in *John Clayton, Pioneer of American Botany* (1963) have followed Bell's advice most precisely. These are a few of many.

But much yet remains to be done in this direction before a history of American science can be written which can show significances in proper proportions and be genuinely comprehensive. The three books here considered add appreciably to the materials the future general historian must employ. They represent in their format three slightly differing approaches, all of them useful.

<sup>1</sup> The following books are considered in this review: Brooke Hindle, *David Rittenhouse*, xiii, 394 pp. Princeton University Press, 1964. \$8.50; J. A. Leo Lemay, *Ebenezer Kinnersley, Franklin's Friend*. 143 pp. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964. \$4.00; and Silvio A. Bedini, *Early American Scientific Instruments and Their Makers*. xii, 184 pp. Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, 1964. \$1.00 [paper].